

Eduardo Padrón

# UPFRONT

FRANCISCO GOYA REVOLUTIONIZED THE ART WORLD at the turn of the 19th century, art historians agree. He was a cultural maverick, breaking with traditional aesthetic values as he highlighted social issues through his work.

A rare collection of 218 etchings by the Spanish master is now on display in Miami, hosted by Miami Dade College. For those who stroll the gallery at the city's historic Freedom Tower, the impact of these masterworks is readily apparent. Etchings from *The Disasters of War* series, in particular, have left many stunned at the power of Goya's vision.

"It is very difficult to look at these images and not think about the world we live in today," said one young student. "To look and not think about

what I believe is impossible."

Precisely. This is the power of the arts—to challenge and transform. But instead, American audiences flocked to the opening of *Resident Evil: Extinction*, a special-effects nightmare that grossed \$24 million. Such is the power of popular culture, a euphemism for the marketplace. As Dana Gioia, chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, suggested in his recent commencement address at Stanford University, "The marketplace does only one thing—it puts a price on

everything." He went on to say that culture should instruct not on the price of things but their value. "Culture should tell us what is beyond price."

Mr. Gioia argued for the value of arts education, yet in our panic over the decline in test scores, K-12 systems across the country are in a frenzy of drill and practice in math and English. The arts, and more, are disappearing from the curriculum. The Washington-based Center on Education Policy found that 44 percent of school districts nationwide have made deep cutbacks in social studies, science, art and music in the elementary grades. In other words, if you can afford it, your child can have a rich experience of the arts.

If educational institutions are not expanding our kids' horizons, then who will? The marketplace? Doubtful. It is committed to entertain, and while none of us need apologize for tuning in to *Dancing with the Stars*, we also need to be challenged. More importantly, our children need to know that not every hero leaps tall buildings or walks the red carpet on Oscar night.

On a recent Saturday evening, Miami Dade College hosted the Spanish Harlem

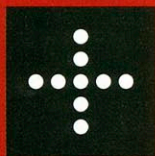
Orchestra, a 13-piece ensemble that brought the house down as it reaffirmed a dazzling Afro-Caribbean music tradition. It was an event that left an impression, that got under the skin in the best possible way. I am insistent that this institution provide a home to such experiences. This month, MDC will host this community's favorite event, Miami Book Fair International, at which 350 authors and an equal number of publishing houses from around the world are greeted by more than half a million members of this community, including tens of thousands of children.

You simply cannot measure the value of such an event. How many kids will be turned on to reading? How many of us will again realize the pleasure of the arts? This classroom has no walls but many heroes, unsung and improbable, at every turn of the page.

The marketplace may stake its claim to popular culture but we also have something to say about it. Art enriches us. We should popularize that notion. **H**

*Dr. Eduardo J. Padrón is president of Miami Dade College, the largest institution of higher education in the nation.*

"CULTURE SHOULD INSTRUCT NOT ON THE PRICE



OF THINGS, BUT THEIR VALUE."